

## CLAIMS

Therefore, having thus described the invention, at least the following is claimed:

1           1.       A system for monitoring guests in a network community, comprising:  
2           an account database maintaining a plurality of resident accounts for a plurality  
3           of resident users of the network community and at least one guest account of at least  
4           one guest of a respective resident user; and  
5           an account server accessing the at least one guest account to determine a status  
6           of the at least one guest account and updating a respective resident account with the  
7           status of the at least one guest account, wherein:  
8           the respective resident account contains guest account information for the at  
9           least one guest sponsored by the respective resident user, the guest account  
10          information being added to the respective resident account upon creation of the at  
11          least one guest account; and  
12          the account server updates the status of the at least one guest account  
13          sponsored by the respective resident user in the respective resident account.

1           2.       The system of claim 1, wherein the guest account information includes  
2           a date upon which a guest invitation was sent to the respective guest and an end-date  
3           upon which the at least one guest account is scheduled to end.

1           3.       The system of claim 2, wherein the guest account information in the  
2           respective resident account is updated to include a modification made to the end-date.

1           4.       The system of claim 2, wherein the guest invitation is an email  
2           message.

1           5.       The system of claim 2, wherein the guest invitation is an instant  
2           message.

1           6.       The system of claim 1, wherein the status of the at least one guest  
2           account is updated in the respective resident account after the status of the at least one  
3           guest account has changed.

1           7.     The system of claim 1, wherein:  
2           a provider of the network community offers a network service to members of  
3     the network community, the members comprising resident users and guests.

1           8.     The system of claim 1, wherein:  
2           the network community comprises an instant messaging community; and  
3           a contact list of the respective resident user is updated with contact  
4     information of a user after a guest invitation is sent from the respective resident user  
5     to the user, wherein:  
6           the contact information of the user is further updated if the user accepts the  
7     guest invitation;  
8           the contact information of the user is removed from the contact list if the user  
9     declines the guest invitation;  
10          the contact list of the respective resident user is made available to the at least  
11     one guest.

1           9.     The system of claim 1, further comprising:  
2           a presence server maintaining presence information of members of the  
3     network community, wherein the presence server determines the presence information  
4     of the at least one guest from the status of the at least one guest account of the at least  
5     one guest, wherein the presence information includes a particular presence state that  
6     indicates that the at least one guest account has not been activated.

1           10.     A system for monitoring guest users of a network community,  
2     comprising:  
3           means for storing a plurality of resident accounts for a plurality of resident  
4     users of the network community and at least one guest account of at least one guest of  
5     a respective resident user;  
6           means for accessing the at least one guest account to determine a status of the  
7     at least one guest account;  
8           means for updating the respective resident account with the status of the at  
9     least one guest account;  
10          means for generating the at least one guest account; and  
11          means for adding account information concerning the at least one guest  
12     account to the respective resident account upon the generation of the at least one guest  
13     account, wherein the account information includes a date upon which a guest  
14     invitation was sent to a respective guest and an end-date upon which the at least one  
15     guest account is scheduled to end.

1           11.     The system of claim 10, further comprising:  
2           means for sending a guest invitation to a user from the respective resident user;  
3     and  
4           means for updating a contact list of the respective resident user with contact  
5     information of the user after the guest invitation is sent from the respective resident  
6     user to the user.

1           12.     The system of claim 10, further comprising:  
2           means for maintaining presence information of members of the network  
3     community, wherein the presence information of the at least one guest is determined  
4     from the status of the at least guest account of the at least one guest, wherein the  
5     presence information of the at least one guest is accessible by the respective resident  
6     user sponsoring the at least one guest.

1           13.     The system of claim 10, further comprising:  
2                 means for notifying the at least one guest of a current status of the at least one  
3     guest account of the at least one guest; and  
4                 means for notifying the respective resident user of the current status of the at  
5     least one guest account of the at least one guest sponsored by the respective resident  
6     user.

1           14.     A method for monitoring guest users of a network community,  
2     comprising the steps of:  
3                 maintaining a plurality of resident accounts for a plurality of resident users of  
4     the network community and at least one guest account of at least one guest of a  
5     respective resident user;  
6                 accessing the at least one guest account to determine a status of the at least one  
7     guest account; and  
8                 updating a respective resident account with the status of the at least one guest  
9     account.

1           15.     The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:  
2                 creating the at least one guest account;  
3                 adding guest information regarding the at least one guest account to the  
4     respective resident account upon the creation of the at least one guest account,  
5     wherein the guest information includes identifying information of the at least one  
6     guest account, wherein the guest information further includes an end-date upon which  
7     the at least one guest account is scheduled to end;  
8                 updating the guest information to incorporate a modification made to the end-  
9     date, wherein the modification is initiated by one of the group comprising the at least  
10    one guest associated with the at least one guest account and the respective resident  
11    user sponsoring the at least one guest account.

1           16.     The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:  
2           updating the status of the at least one guest account in the respective resident  
3           account if a user has accepted a guest invitation from the respective resident user of  
4           the respective resident account; and  
5           updating the status of the at least one guest account in the respective resident  
6           account if the user has declined the guest invitation from the respective resident user.

1           17.     The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:  
2           defining different representations for the status of the at least one guest  
3           account;  
4           updating the status of the at least one guest account to a first representation if  
5           a user has accepted the guest invitation from the respective resident user and the  
6           respective resident user does not have a vacant guest slot available for the user; and  
7           updating the status information of the at least one guest account to a second  
8           representation if the user has accepted a guest invitation from the respective resident  
9           user and the user has successfully completed a procedure for setting-up the at least  
10          guest account of the user.

1           18.     The method of claim 14, further comprising the step of:  
2           providing a network service to members of the network community, the  
3           members comprising resident users and guests.

1           19.     The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:  
2           sending a guest invitation to a user from the respective resident user;  
3           updating a contact list of the respective resident user with contact information  
4           of the user after the guest invitation is sent from the respective resident user to the  
5           user;  
1           updating the contact information of the user with additional information  
2           provided by the user if the user accepts the guest invitation; and  
1           removing the contact information of the user from the contact list if the user  
2           declines the guest invitation.

1           20.     The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:  
2           maintaining presence information on members of the network community,  
3           wherein members comprise resident users and guests of the resident users;  
4           determining presence information of the at least one guest based upon the  
5           status information in the guest account of the at least one guest; and  
1           enabling the respective resident user sponsoring the at least one guest to access  
2           the presence information of the at least one guest.